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Affordable housing on the way at Kekaha

By Paul C. Curtis - The Garden Island

Somewhere between the good-natured verbal prodding and mock 'o'o jousting involving Mayor Bryan J. Baptiste and Tommy Contrades, officials managed to break ground and bless the site and principals of a badly needed housing project for Native Hawaiians in Kekaha Thursday.

Contrades, finishing up his terms as the Kaua'i and Ni'ihau member of the state Department of Hawaiian Home Lands Commission, and Baptiste, have known each other since "small-kid time," and were having some fun with the mock verbal warfare and the crossing of the 'o'o, or digging sticks, before and after the formal ceremonies.

Judge Kathleen N.A. Watanabe, a Kaua'i native just confirmed by the state Senate to become a Circuit Court judge on Kaua'i, attended the ground-breaking ceremony.

Federal, state and county officials, and community leaders, gathered to help break ground at a ceremony commemorating the start of construction on the Kekaha Residence Lots, Unit 4 project on state Department of Hawaiian Home Lands property.

A total of 49 lots will be developed as either turnkey or self-help homes, or vacant lots, on 20 acres, with 22 of the lots reserved for Native Hawaiian families whose household incomes do not exceed 80 percent of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) median income for the island of Kaua'i (80 percent of the HUD median income on Kaua'i is \$51,700 for a family of four).

Infrastructure improvements should be done in October, when construction on the homes is expected to begin. Home construction is expected to be finished by October of next year.

Goodfellow Brothers, Inc. is the site contractor for the \$5.1-million project funded by the Hawaiian Home Lands Trust Fund and Native American Housing and Self-Determination Act funds from HUD.

"This is the first homestead-construction project on Kaua'i since 1997, and the first project in Kekaha since 1988," said Micah Kane, DHHL chair.

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